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# Is There Time to Talk About Apartheid?

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WASHINGTON — After paying only modest attention to South Africa for four years, the Reagan Administration last week was forced to give urgent foreign policy priority to what Secretary of State George P. Shultz called "a very painful part of the world" and a situation that "wrenches at us so deeply."

Administration officials expressed anguish at their inability to moderate the black-led violence and the white minority Government's repression, which culminated last week in the proclamation of the state of emergency and hundreds of political arrests. The Administration was also having the difficulty making credible its opposition to apartheid, "the real cause of violence in South Africa," the White House said. While calling on Pretoria to lift the emergency decree, it continued to oppose sanctions.

South Africa is critically important, American officials assert, because of its minerals such as gold, diamonds, coal and uranium, and its strategic location on major shipping routes. If the violence grew into another Iran or Nicaragua, the repercussions would be far-reaching. However, American intelligence reports say the Afrikaner minority is powerful and unflinching, capable of quashing any threat to the Government.

But if imminent collapse seems unlikely, there is clear recognition for the first time in the White House that Administration policy has become a troublesome domestic issue. American political leaders are increasingly calling for sanctions.

In Congress, the question is not whether there should be sanctions, but how severe. President Reagan and Secretary Shultz have declared their abhorrence of apartheid and have recalled the United States Ambassador, but critics still view their policy as too supportive of South Africa. This month, the Senate voted sanctions that would ban new bank loans to the South African Government, sales of computers to its security agencies and the sales of good used in nuclear production. The House has approved even tougher sanctions, such as a ban on new American investment in South African companies as well as the importation of Krugerrands, the South African gold coins sold to investors. The action in Congress followed widespread public protests against South African policies. The Administration argues against sanctions on the ground that they would accomplish little. It is considering a South African request for a high-level meeting with its officials, if that could produce an improvement.

"The alternative is apparently to say 'a plague on your house,'" Mr. Shultz said in off-the-cuff remarks to a foreign policy conference. With whatever capability we have, he said, "we should stay there, and we should work for what we think is right. We should seek justice in South Africa."

The White House was annoyed when France announced last week that it was recalling its ambassador and banning new investment in South Africa. The State Department said the ban could "undermine South Africa's economy and create additional hardships" for blacks. When the United Nations Security Council met at France's request and also urged a ban on new investment, the United States and Britain abstained.

The Administration approach has been to keep Chester A. Crocker, the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, working for a negotiated agreement in southern Africa but avoiding direct criticism of South Africa's internal situation. They hope to bring independence to South-West Africa, known as Namibia, and the withdrawal of the 30,000 Cuban troops in Angola.

The Administration thought that by avoiding criticism of South Africa, in an approach known as "constructive engagement," a Namibian accord could be hammered out. The United States offered a compromise plan for Namibia in March, but it was swept aside as South Africa launched new military attacks on neighboring

countries and sent police and army troops against black protesters. With Congressional pressure for sanctions rising, the Administration called home Ambassador Herman W. Nickel last month. Then South Africa proclaimed the state of emergency, setting off a shock wave in Washington, where long meetings, including discussions between Mr. Reagan and Cabinet members, produced few new ideas.

The Administration still hopes for dialogue between moderate blacks and the Government that would cover the whole range of grievances and work out a way to end apartheid. "True peace will come only when apartheid ends and when the Government negotiates with, rather than locks up, representative black leaders," Mr. Shultz said. But how can such a dialogue be arranged? The violence among blacks seems aimed in part at those who are seen as cooperating with the Government. A leading State Department expert said last week that discussions could have a chance only if the South African authorities released Nelson Mandela, a leader of the African National Congress, who has been in prison since 1962 and is 67 years old. The British Foreign Secretary, Sir Geoffrey Howe, also called for his release last week. "Mandela is the only black who has the moral authority to negotiate with the Government," the American official said. "There isn't much time left for dialogue."